“The ‘real world’ won’t accommodate you”:
Helping Students with Emotional and Behavioural Disorders Achieve Academic Success

By

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Abstract

In Canada, approximately 15-25% of children have at least one mental health problem or illness, and approximately 70% of adults with mental health problems have their onset during adolescence. Students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) are commonly misidentified in educational settings; this can result in a negative effect on their opportunity to succeed in the classroom as well as their overall happiness. This study explored how Ontario secondary school teachers help students with EBD succeed in the classroom in hope to improve these outcomes. Two secondary school teachers were interviewed on their current practices for and beliefs about helping students with EBD in their classrooms. The findings suggest that there are roadblocks to helping students with EBD in the bigger picture, but that teachers can contribute a significant influence through practical strategies inside and outside the classroom. Both teachers emphasized the need to “get to know your students” to help them succeed academically in their classrooms. The findings imply that much more needs to be done to support students with EBD succeed in the classroom. The support needs to come from teachers, parents, administration and the Ministry. School administrators play the role of a host in building a support community that involves the parents, teachers and students. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education should consider investing in greater funding in supporting teachers and students with EBD in the process of helping them succeed in the classroom.

**Key Words:** Student academic success, secondary teachers, emotional and behavioural disorders, at-risk
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

This research study examined the current and best practices of secondary school teachers in helping students with emotional and behavioural disorders in general education classrooms. The purpose was to take a closer look into one of the mental health problems youth face in our society today. Mental health and well-being has been one of the most prominent topics in Western society for the last decade. Social media, employers, and researchers often attempt to find ways to ‘prove’ that better mental health and well-being will lead to happier and more successful lives. It has been found that adults who suffer from mental health problems have their onset during their adolescence (Asher, 2005). Since most of adolescents’ time is spent in schools, it seems logical to tackle issues relating to mental health in schools. Because of this, schools are trying to find ways to preserve the mental health and well-being of its students in order to promote their greater future happiness and success.

Mental health and mental illnesses have been commonly been mistaken as synonymous; however, this is not necessarily true. The Mental Health Commission of Canada (2010) defines mental health as “integral to our overall health [and is] the state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with normal stresses of life, and can work productively, and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community” (p. 3). This misunderstanding leads to an unnecessary negative stigmatization of students who demonstrate problems with their mental health within the school setting because it is often viewed more as a mental illness. Educational institutions have adopted various labels that help identify students with mental health problems. However, the process of identification is not consistent and can be quite vague. This leads to many students being misidentified or
unidentified in schools (Mental Health Commission of Canada, 2010). Some of the labels include ‘at-risk students’, ‘students with a learning disability’, or ‘students with IEPs’. Majority of the time, students who are identified with some sort of mental health label are placed in Special Education classrooms. Like the misunderstanding of defining mental health with mental illness, there is a negative connotation to students who are placed in Special Education classrooms and this in turn can negatively affect their learning process and academic success (Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez & Damico, 2007). However, mental health can differ from student-to-student and lies on a spectrum of problems. Often times, students who “lash out” or display emotional and behavioural problems in the classroom, are perceived as having a mental health problem and needs special attention in school. Some teachers automatically associate students who do not pay attention in class, fall asleep in class, or those who are constantly texting have some sort of emotional and behavioural disorder (EBD). This existing preliminary identification process in the school system does not account for the variability in the spectrum of problems that students’ may face, nor does it account for the root of their problem, which ultimately leads to improper implementation of intervention programs (Dworet & Maich, 2007).

In attempt to improve student mental well-being, in the year 2011 the Government of Ontario, with the assistance of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, Ministry of Youth Services, and the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME), launched the “Supporting Minds” (OME, 2013) strategy to bring attention to mental health problems in youth. The strategy focuses on providing early identification and intervention services, and raise awareness in response to the overall problems associated with mental health. In the year 2013, the OME created a draft version that was meant to improve the “Supporting Minds” document, by catering practices towards youth in the school setting particularly. This draft has yet to be released to this
day. Without a ministry standard, teachers employ their own beliefs and assumptions upon students who may exhibit characteristics of EBD which may lead to risky intervention attempts and biased assessments by the teacher and the school.

1.1 Research Problem

In Canada, approximately 15-25% of children have from at least one mental health problem or illness, and approximately 70% of adults with mental health problems have their onset during adolescence. Students who are identified as having a mental health problem and are placed in specialized classrooms, have a better chance of having their problems solved through proper interventions (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2016). Currently, there is a great emphasis on providing students with accommodations and using individualized education plan (IEPs) to help students achieve academic success, but whether or not this is an effective way of helping students cope with their mental health remains unclear. As stated by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) (2006), “mental health is not simply the absence of mental illness but also encompasses social, emotional, and behavioural health and the ability to cope with life’s challenges” (p. 1). It is important for educators to aim for more than good grades and good behaviour, but to reach for greater success through better mental and overall well-being. Every student should have the opportunity to succeed in their daily academics, but also in the social, emotional and environmental aspects of their lives.

Students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) are commonly misidentified in the educational setting. Often, these students are categorized as ‘at-risk’, ‘delinquent’ or completely unidentified (Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez & Damico, 2007). In the context of my research, EBD includes students with anxiety problems, depression, disruptive behavioural problems, dissociative disorders, emotional problems, and problems maintaining interpersonal
relationships, and these can be a result of issues with self-confidence, self-efficacy, self-awareness, social awareness, social skills, and responsible decision making skills. In the long-term if left untreated, youth with emotional and behavioural disorders can end up having “conduct problems, aggression, anti-social behaviour, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse” (The Schubert Center for Child Studies, 2009, p. 1) which can highly affect their overall happiness and success later in life. And since we know that early intervention is of significance in helping relieve these long-term effects, it is important for us to tackle the problem during adolescence where peer influence is heightened (Albert, Chein, & Steinberg, 2013).

With this, there is a seemingly positive intention to improve mental well-being in the youth in schools, but there is an evident disconnect. This gap in our action plan in improving mental well-being and helping those who may have problems coping with mental health, needs to be minimized in order to raise the wellness of society.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand how Ontario high school teachers are working to support students with EBD. To explore this topic, I will interview a small sample of these teachers about reported barriers that they face when teaching students with EBD, practices that teachers reportedly use to help students with EBD succeed in their classroom, perspectives teachers have on the current supports, and the perceived role on student success. More specifically, my research will investigate these questions amongst teachers in general education classrooms who work with students with EBD.

The aim is to share these findings with the educational research community and with other teachers in order to help relieve the negative stigma around working with students with EBD, and other mental health problems, and to improve supports for students with EBD.
Hopefully with my findings, educators can better live up to the philosophy that every student has the opportunity to succeed.

1.3 Research Questions

The central research question guiding my study is: how are Ontario high school teachers working to support students with EBD? My research is also guided by the following subquestions:

- What are the practices that teachers reportedly use to help students with EBD succeed in their classroom?
- What role do teachers perceive themselves to play in these students’ academic and non-academic experiences?
- What are these teachers’ perspectives on current interventions for students with EBD?
- What reported barriers do they face when teaching students with EBD?
- What supports aid them in supporting these students?

The purpose of these questions is to gain an understanding of some best practices in helping students with EBD succeed in the classroom, to understand the multiple perspectives on this topic at-large, and if these perspectives may play a role in the stigmatizing of EBD.

1.4 Reflexive Positioning Statement

My undergraduate studies and personal research have guided me towards an interest in social relationships and emotional well-being. I believe that, with the amount of time we spend in schools during our developmental years, schools play a significant role in shaping the emotional well-being of the individuals in our society. I am interested in the varying mechanisms that exist in individuals with emotional and behavioural disorders and find it fascinating that each individual can have a very unique onset. Each student in my future
classroom will have a completely different story and finding a way to help them each succeed is intriguing to me.

Through my employment experiences outside of high schools, I have noticed certain behaviours in some of my colleagues and clients that make me question their upbringing and schooling. For example, when I am training new staff members, I use different approaches to help them understand simple operations. Sometimes, I am not immediately successful and I wonder why. When I start observing their behaviours, I see that they do not take initiative to find out more, are unfocused, or lack engagement. This surprises me because I have never experienced this feeling myself for the workplace; however, I have experienced this at school. I wondered if these behaviours were adopted and sustained from their schooling and what teachers are doing to address these issues. Another example is when I have to handle frustrating clients and I am always pleasantly surprised that I am able to keep my composure. Often times, I would see my colleagues reacting to clients differently than I would and sometimes, this is in an inappropriate manner. In this aspect, it can sometimes be difficult for me to train them on how to resolve conflict with clients as I realize I learned how to keep my composure through my own trial-and-error. I have thought back countlessly to my high school years about what coping methods I was taught to be, what society thought as, a “well-mannered” young woman. Though my teachers were never explicit on teaching character development, I gained conflict resolution skills through observation of others and self-reflection. This makes me wonder how I would handle a difficult client if I had not been taught to self-reflect in my adolescent years in my schooling, and what the outcome is for students who did not have teachers who went out of their way to teach outside of the curriculum. As such, part of this study is to examine how and if
teachers teach beyond what is in textbooks to help students with EBD succeed in their classrooms.

In my philosophy of teaching and learning, I believe that a successful teacher is able to teach students how to become successful members of society and to be global citizens. I believe that excessive accommodations and personalized differentiated instruction are an unrealistic approach as a teacher, and as a learner. In my practicum experiences, I am often asked to provide these kinds of accommodations to students with emotional and behavioural disorders. The individualized education plan asks me to give them extra time on tests, for example, but most of these students do not need this accommodation in actuality. They tend to use the extra time to gaze out the window or draw a blank stare at the ceiling tiles. The extra time is not actually helping them succeed, but more so giving them an excuse to lose focus on a test. In one particular incident, I attempted to make contact with these students who would use the extra time inefficiently. I would approach them and remind them to refocus and to remember what they had studied. To my surprise, these students began to wean off the extra time that was given to them. So, this now makes me question, is giving extra time on a test a viable accommodation for a student with EBD? Is it viable for them in the long-run? What is the real purpose of giving them extra time if they are not using it wisely? To me, the current theoretical practices in helping student with EBD are not efficient, and this study is meant to find out what methods are effective. I hope that my future students will be able to learn in various ways and to effectively assess with their accommodation needs in order to cope with the variation of challenges in life. Thus, in my perspective, I would approach students with EBD with greater personal care using relevant content to help them succeed academically and further after graduation. I understand that other educators may not agree with my viewpoint and that I must keep my personal
philosophy in mind during the research process. Furthermore, I find it relatively common that most educators, like myself, do not have first-hand experience with people who have emotional and behavioural disorders, and thus researching and learning about this topic is even more crucial in helping students with EBD develop coping methods.

1.5 MTRP Overview

I have conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview Ontario high school teachers in general education classrooms who work or have worked with students with EBD in regards to their knowledge, experience and teaching strategies of students with emotional and behavioural disorders. In Chapter 2, I review the literature in the areas of emotional and behavioural disorders in the classroom, teachers’ role in student academic success, and lifelong success for students with emotional and behavioural disorders, including research on existing intervention programs. In Chapter 3, I elaborate on my research design including sampling criteria, sampling methods, and the benefits and limitations of the study’s methodology. In Chapter 4, I report my research findings and discuss their significance in regards to existing research literature. In Chapter 5, I identify the implications of my findings for my own teaching and learning philosophy and for the educational research community in general. I also pose questions for future research in this area.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in areas of students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) in secondary schools, the role of the teacher in student academic achievement, and existing intervention programs bringing students with EBD towards academic success. More specifically, I review themes related to mental health stigmatization, perspectives on EBD and learning disabilities, and the influences EBD can have on a student’s academic achievement. Next, I review research on pedagogies and learning environments have been found to foster positive academic performance in the classroom for these students. From there, I will review the findings of best intervention practices for students with EBD. By reviewing the literature on what we know about EBD, the implications of EBD on students, teacher practices and intervention practices by the institutions, I will be able to see how my research problem fits in the scheme of education literature.

2.1 Defining Emotional and Behavioural Disorders (EBD)

In as early as 1987, EBDs were labelled as behavioural disorders or serious emotional disturbances. Children with these labels tended to be associated with mental health or juvenile facilities (Kauffman, Cullinan, & Epstein, 1987). More currently, students with EBD often show characteristics of non-compliance, aggression, disruption, self-injury, antisocial behaviour, and demonstrate poor academic performance that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory or health impairments (Reid, Gonzalez, Nordness, Trout, & Epstein, 2004; Scott & Shearer-Lingo, 2002). A universal definition and terminology associated with EBD has been controversial and abstract, which makes this topic rather difficult to grasp by many educators. Many of the existing definitions of EBD are characterized by the difference between the individual’s
behavioural and emotional responses with social norms, which can negatively impacts academic performance (Forness & Knitzer, 1992; Mundschenk & Simpson, 2014; Walker, Yell, & Murray, 2014).

Often, children with EBD also exhibit characteristics of learning disorders (LD) (Glassberg, Hooper, & Mattison, 1999). This, along with ineffective intervention programs, may result in students with EBD experiencing even less academic success than students in other disorder subgroups (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). Like mental health disorders, EBD tends to be highly stigmatized in the education environment which may subsequently hinder a student’s desire to seek special assistance leading to improve academic performance (Kauffman, 2014).

In the subsections to follow, I explore the relationship between EBD and LD and the barriers that students with EBD face in secondary schools.

2.1.1 Relationship between EBD and LD

Emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) and learning disorders (LD) are often characteristics of students labelled and identified as “at-risk” in secondary schools (Glassberg, 1999). In secondary schools, students with EBD and LD are identified by their previous academic performance history (Glassberg, 1999; Kauffman, 2013). Students under this category are often grouped together and placed in the same Special Education classrooms as part of their intervention program (Glassberg, 1999; Landrum, 2003). Grouping EBD and LD in the same category seems like an intuitive classification; however, the consequences often disprove this as these two categories of students vary widely in their needs. There is surprisingly limited Canadian literature on how EBD is defined and distinguished by educators. Developing a working definition for EBD in schools is important beginning in creating more effective
intervention programs to help students succeed in secondary schools and to minimize stigmatization (Glassberg, 1999; Kauffman, 2013).

2.1.2 Barriers facing students with EBDs

Often, students with EBD and students with LD are grouped in the same category and are given the same accommodations in the classroom. However, it has been shown that students with LD are more likely to demonstrate greater academic progress than students with EBD in elementary special education classrooms. These students with EBD then move onto secondary education where the situation will usually follow the same pattern (Anderson, Kutash, & Duchnowski, 2001). Several studies have found that students with EBD struggle in all academic subject areas but with literacy and numeracy most particularly, and continue to show stabilizing deficits through age, compared to students with LD (Levy & Chard, 2001; Nelson, Benner, Lane & Smith, 2004; Trout, Nordness Pierce, & Epstein, 2003). Students with EBD tend to have lower grades, fail more courses and are kept back a grade more often than students with other disabilities or disorders (Frank, Sitlington, & Carson, 1995; Koyangi & Gaines, 1993).

2.1.3 Stigmatization of EBD in secondary schools

Several studies (Bowers, Manion, Papdopoulos, & Gauvreau, 2012; Garner, Kauffman, & Elliot, 2014) have shown that seeking school-based mental health services is perceived as stigmatized by young people compared to service providers. Young people, with or without self-identifying mental health concerns, are more likely to believe that this stigmatization is a barrier to them seeking help and an effectiveness in special education classrooms. A stigmatized and negative public perception of EBD has demonstrated to be one of the greatest predictors of a student identifying as having EBD (Kauffman, 2013; Kauffman, 2014; Mattison, 2014).
In attempt of many researchers to minimize stigmatization of mental health or EBD, some researchers have found that students themselves are the perpetuator of stigmatization, but most have placed the responsibility on the school as an organization; presenting notions in which the problem lies in the hands of educators and the education system (Cook & Ruhaak, 2014; Gerber, 2014; Thomas, 2014). Differentiated education and special education is suggested to be an important aspect amongst universal education in correctly identifying, and thus help minimize stigmatization of students with EBD (Forness, Freeman, Paparella, Kauffman, & Walker, 2012; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005; Kauffman & Lloyd 2011; Zigmond & Klo, 2011).

All-in-all, students with EBD tend to face barriers similar to those with LD because they are often categorized together. However, students with EBD are less likely to succeed with the accommodations that are also given to students with LD in secondary schools. This demonstrate that there is some discrepancy with what we know in theory that will help students with EBD and the execution in the identification process of the needs for students with EBD.

2.2 Teachers’ Role in the Academic Success of Students with EBDs

When designing programs to help students with EBD succeed in their academics, it is important for educators to understand the importance of teacher support on a students’ social and emotional well-being. It has been widely found that, in general, positive teacher-student relationships are associated with beneficial outcomes for adolescents’ overall well-being and academic achievement (Hughes, Luo, Kwok, & Loyd, 2008; Malecki, & Demaray, 2003). Teachers generally are influential figures to their students and can use this to their advantage by providing support and guidance to help vulnerable students to learn and become successful (Doll, Zucker, & Brehm, 2004). Because of this powerful influence, in order for teachers to play a
significant role in a student’s academic success, it is important to them to create supportive classroom environments and foster positive teacher-student relationships.

2.2.1 Influences of classroom environment on academic success

In a study by Suldo (2009), the researchers performed a focus group discussion to find out students’ perceptions on teachers’ care. The results showed that students felt the teacher cared about them when additional academic assistance was provided; students’ learning preferences were considered, and when teachers took interest in the students’ wellness beyond their academic achievements. In specific, students liked when teachers asked personal questions, were pleasant and respectful, and allowed students to have free time during the school day. These findings are generally consistent with what we know about teacher-student relationships and supportive environments (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). In essence, with the understanding of a teacher’s influence on their students, teachers should form a community in their classroom where trust, honesty and respect is valued by the teacher. In several studies, it has been found that a supportive classroom environment that includes aspects of teacher care, differentiated instruction, culturally relevant pedagogy and accommodations help students achieve their academic goals (Doll et al., 2004).

These aspects can become increasingly difficult if students with EBD are in classrooms where other students do not exhibit these problems, or mainstream classes. Although some studies indicate that an inclusive classroom environment fosters better learning for all, other studies have shown that students with EBD negatively affect the learning of other students and in turn affect their own learning due to a lowered sense of acceptance in that classroom (Rosenberg & Jackman, 2003; Scates, 2005). On the other hand, placing students with EBD in Special Education classrooms can be problematic if placement process is not regulated resulting in the
program being seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy (Dworet & Maich, 2007). As such, there is no simple solution to creating a healthy learning environment for all students and, in particular, students with EBD.

2.2.2 Teacher-student relationships

Johnson (2008) has shown that resilience-promoting teachers can help students with EBD by making themselves accessible to students, engaging in active listening towards students’ concerns, teaching the necessary literacy and numeracy skills for independent learning, being empathetic while providing advice and strategies, advocating for students, and promoting pro-social bonding between themselves and the student.

In positive teacher-student relationships, students feel a degree of respect, support and significance which helps those who are already vulnerable to learn to be successful (Doll et al., 2004). In a study by Malecki and Demaray (2003), the researchers compared the influences of emotional, instrumental, appraisal and informational support on their well-being from parents, classmates, close friends, and teachers. The researchers found that teacher influence was the most predictive of better social skill and academic achievement. These findings were also consistent with several other studies (Brewster & Bowen, 2004; Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007). Further, several studies have demonstrated that the association between teacher support and student academic success is generally applicable to all cultures and ethnicities in Western educational environments through studying the outcome across different communities (Close & Solberg, 2008; Hughes & Kwok, 2007).

2.3 EBD and Success in Life

Several studies have found that students with EBD tend to perform one to two years below their grade level (Trout et al., 2003) where their onset usually starts at a young age and
continue to persist throughout their adolescence (Coutinho, 1986; Rosenblatt & Rosenblatt, 1999; Wagner, 1995). The pattern of EBD’s onset usually results in students with EBD to perform significantly lower than their same-age peers at an older age compared to when they were at a younger age (Couthino, 1986) which can be highly determining of their academic decisions due to the significance of peer influence during adolescence (Albert, Chein, & Steinberg, 2006). There is also some evidence that EBD is associated with lower graduations rates, greater chances of grade retention, and a lower likelihood of attending postsecondary school (Kauffman, 2001; Wagner, 1995).

If EBD patterns exist after leaving school, it has been estimated that approximately 70% of these students will be arrested within three years of departure. Researchers have inferred that academic underachievement is one of the most powerful predictors of at-risk behaviour and inability to integrate into the real world at a later age (Maguin & Locher, 1996; Morrison & D’Ineanu, 1997), and that academic success is a significant predictor of decrease in at-risk behaviour (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Skroban, 1996).

2.3.1. Existing intervention and preventative programs in secondary schools

The official placement process of students with EBD into intervention programs varies widely between provinces. In a study by Dworet & Maich (2007), Ontario educators also mostly reported to have a single definition for students with EBD and do not consider the severity of the situation. These researchers also found that the identification and placement of students with EBD is determined in a formal process that includes the input of educational professionals and parents.

In some schools, community programs have provided some insight on how to help students with EBD to succeed in their academics. Not only do the individual characteristics of
the student matter, but the social and physical environment of the child’s learning also plays a large role by including aspects like healthy relationships, social identity, social justice, sense of belongingness, community and meaningful purpose (Ungar, Brown, Liebenberg, Othman, Kwong, Armstrong, & Gilgun, 2007). Some research has shown that students who are accessible to these aspects are more likely to do well in school (Ungar, Liebenberg, Armstrong, Dudding, & van de Vijver, 2012).

Many existing programs for students in EBD in Ontario emphasize both non-academic and academic goals in their intervention (Dworet & Maich, 2007; Minnard, 2002). The non-academic aspects promote cultural activities, community initiatives, pro-social behaviour, lower drug use, and prevention of delinquent behaviour, which have been found to assist in boosting self-esteem and later success in life. These programs also show a potential to influence school engagement and academic performance in association with higher self-confidence (Minnard, 2002). Within the classroom, it has been consistently found in most Canadian jurisdiction, that when handling the education of students with EBD, most schools will offer educational assistants including student assistants and teacher assistants, with Ontario offering the greatest range of services (Dworet & Maich, 2007).

While there are many promising intervention programs to help students with EBD, the programs can be ineffective because of the lack of systematic and effective strategies that implement these programs to individual students. In other words, our education system has the right ideas in helping students with EBD, but schools are not given the adequate resources in executing these programs (Santor, Short, & Ferguson, 2009).
2.3.2 Best practices

Some research (Cassen, Feinstein & Graham, 2008; Minnard, 2002, Ungar, 2011) have shown that a caring school community helps foster better relationships and trust in the academic environment which can in turn facilitate the success of students with EBD. These schools aid in relieving learning challenges, and help compensate for disadvantages of the social ecology of a student’s living environment and their socio-economic status (Cassen et al., 2008; Minnard, 2002). Other research has found that changing the child’s context and social ecology rather than adapting the child to a poorly resourced environment as a philosophy to good intervention programs (Cassen et al., 2008; Ungar, 2011).

Prevention and early intervention are mostly the most effective way of helping students with EBD to succeed. In cases where intervention programs are required, several studies have shown that placement of students in the correct program plays a significant role in their future perceived academic success due to proper implementation of intervention practices. The literature shows there are many variations in definitions, identification, and placement of students with EBD and this should be an aspect to change in order to have better practices (Dworet & Maich, 2007).

2.4 Conclusion

In this literature review, I looked at research on historical implications of students with EBD, the unclear definitions and identifications of students with EBD, the effects of classroom climate on a student with EBD, the life-long effects of educators’ actions and inactions, and existing intervention initiatives that are taking place regardless of their effectiveness. The literature describes how students with EBD are provided with supports but are consistently not improving in school, thus prevails the problem. It also raises questions about what teachers are
doing in their classroom instruction to help support these students, and what aspects of these existing intervention programs are not helping these students succeed in school and further into society. There is a lack of literature in this area within the context of Canadian secondary schools, and where there is research; it demonstrates that Canada has unclear definitions of students with EBD. This indicates the need for further research in different geographical areas which may possess a difference in culture and understanding of EBD. In light of this, the purpose of my research is to fill the gap in the Canadian literature on this topic. I hope to gain insight on what are the best practices for teachers helping students with EBD in mainstream classrooms succeed academically, and to bring awareness to the education community regarding the spectrum on students with EBD in order to help alleviate our problems in defining the term.
Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss the research design of my qualitative study in regards to the significance of the approach, the details of the data collection, and information about my research participants and sampling criteria. Limitations, strengths, and ethical constructs will also be considered in this chapter.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to investigate how Ontario high school teachers are reportedly supporting students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD), and the perceived impact of their practices on students with EBD.

Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in the method of data collection and data analysis. Some forms of qualitative research include biography, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory, ethnography and action research (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). As stated by Denzin and Lincoln (2000), “qualitative researchers study phenomena in their natural settings and strive to make sense of, or to interpret them with respect to the meanings people bring to them” (p. 774). This allows the researcher to capture the emic or insider’s view rather than the researcher’s view, or the etic (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005; Onwegbuzie & Leech, 2004).

In this study, I used semi-structured interviewing methods to gain phenomenological data. Quantitative methods were not used because I wanted to understand the participants’ personal meanings on the topic without restricting their responses through scales and quantitative measures and thereby imposing my meanings on the topic. My research method allowed for this as I studied the experiences people faced in their natural state, and not in a highly controlled quantitative research approach (Creswell et al., 2007).
Qualitative research allowed us to epistemologically understand the experiences of teachers and their perspectives on supporting students with EBD. A teacher’s perspective and experience with students with EBD can fall on a wide spectrum and is dependent on many factors. Data like these – which do not have an underlying numerical value or cannot be measured through calibrated instruments – are difficult to apply quantitative measures to. As described by Nastasi & Schensul (2005), “the premature use of close-ended scales denies the opportunity for the researcher to discover new information about context and meanings that were not anticipated prior to the initiation of the research” (p. 178). Qualitative methods allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of participants’ experiences.

For my particular research topic, a qualitative approach was a necessity. The purpose of this study was to gain knowledge on current practices, perceptions, and experiences of teachers supporting students with EBD in an attempt to promote effective intervention programs and resources. In order to develop appropriate interventions, it was important that we understand the “complex, multi-person interactive behaviours, and/or societal contexts [of the phenomena]” (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005, p. 179). By using qualitative methods, I am putting forth effort in capturing “macro-level historical, institutional, and social processes” (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005, p. 179) through allowing participants to define their own culture and context in semi-structured interviews. Alternatively, if highly controlled quantitative measures were used to find out how teachers support these students, the findings cannot be directly transferable to what actually happens in the classroom (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). In reality, we do not have to use quantitative measures – like giving students a numerical rating on their IEP – to understand students with EBD; rather we may use biographical references in understanding student behaviour and to capture the diversity in the student population. Qualitative methods – in
particular semi-structured in-depth interviews – provided room for authentic conversation and realistic application of the knowledge gained from the research. By being asked to describe understandings and perspectives, participants were better able to gain a personal connection with the conversation and thus provide meaningful insight into my research topic.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In this study, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the guidance of an interview protocol (see Appendix B) with high school teachers who work with students with EBD in general education (i.e. not special education) classrooms in the Greater Toronto Area. Thus, interviews were the main instrument of data collection in this study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Maxwell, 1992; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). These 60-to-75-minute interviews were recorded using a recording application on my iPhone and were later manually transcribed.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the potential to gain significant depth in addressing the research questions. Qualitative interviewing helped me gain multiple perspectives across cultures, institutions and settings, and thus further using this information in application of intervention programs in our diverse education system (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Using qualitative methods in natural environments to study how teachers support students with EBD allowed for real-life applications of the findings. Prepared prompts and guiding grand tour questions were asked in an attempt to gain further insight and detail on the participants’ responses (Creswell et al., 2007). My interview protocol in Appendix B outlines the specific questions and possible prompts. The questions were influenced by the subheadings addressed in my literature review and also my central research question. Some of the questions include:

- How would you describe your role in your students’ lives?
• In what ways can teachers incorporate student differences in lesson planning and instruction?
• What are some challenges you have with students with EBD in the classroom?
  ➢ How are you or how are you not supported in your solutions?
• What changes do you think could be made at the school, school board, or provincial level to help students with EBD succeed in the classroom?
• What advice would you give to another colleague on teaching students with EBD?

3.3 Participants

This study adopted purposive sampling for recruitment and selection of participants. These participants were high school teachers from the Greater Toronto Area who work with students with EBD in their general education classrooms. In this section, I provide the rationale for the developed sampling criteria and the method of sampling.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

The participants recruited for my study were required to fulfill a set of sampling criteria. Teachers must have been secondary school teachers teaching full-time for one or more years; these teachers are considered to be “experienced teachers” for the purpose of my research. Recruiting experienced teachers instead of novice teachers was my attempt at gaining insight on the reality of supporting students with EBD rather than what would work in theory. Understanding the realities of applying theory into practice will allow for thorough analysis of what the best practices are when supporting students with EBD (Beijaard, Verloop, & Vermunt, 1999; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2006). As mentioned in Chapter 1, the onsets of adults with mental health problems have their onset during their adolescence (Asher, 2005). As a result, high school is a prime time for educators to tackle students’ mental well-being and help them
develop coping methods to deter them from sustaining mental health problems later on in life. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the practices of secondary school teachers for the purpose of my research topic.

The participants were also required to be teaching in general education classrooms that have students with EBD included within them. I chose this sampling criterion because I wanted to understand the perspective of general education teachers on students with EBD. In many schools, students with EBD are placed in special education classrooms. Special education classrooms have been well-developed as these teachers generally have training and qualification in special education instruction. Little attention has been paid towards emerging these students in general education classrooms and many of these teachers may have little to no training in special education. For the purposes of my research, this group of participants were better able to provide me insight on the best practices for general education teachers to support students with EBD as they are not normally submerged in well-resourced special education classrooms (Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick, & Scheer, 1999; Shade & Stewart, 2001).

The last criterion is that the teachers must be teaching in the Greater Toronto Area. The geographic area in which the teacher teaches in is significant in investigating differences in cultural, social and economic influences. In an area where interventions for mental health and EBD are gaining increased attention, I thought it would be interesting to see how these pressures influence the practice of teachers in supporting students with EBD (Rushowy, 2014; TDSB, 2014).

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

The goal of my research was to gain insight into teachers’ perspectives and supports for students with EBD, thus I adopted a purposive sampling method in recruiting and selecting my
participants (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). It was important that I used qualitative methods of sampling instead of quantitative methods because qualitative approaches are more likely to capture the results we hope to acquire in my research topic. In quantitative sampling, the purpose is to generalize the results of a population through a small randomized sample and a pre-determined hypothesis. On the other hand, as stated by Marshall (1996), “qualitative studies aim to provide illumination and understanding of complex psychosocial issues” (p. 522). The aim of my research was to gain a holistic understanding of the topic and I expected this to be quite complex. A quantitative method would not have been able to achieve this intended goal. I used a qualitative sampling method in order to recruit participants able to provide insightful information on the topic. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) describe seven different purposive sampling schemes that included “maximum variation, critical case sampling, theory-based sampling, typical case sampling, random purposeful sampling, multi-stage purposeful random sampling, and multi-stage purposeful sampling” (pp. 247-248). In my study, I adopted the critical case sampling where I chose “settings, groups, and/or individuals based on specific characteristic(s)” (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007, p. 285) to provide specific insight on the phenomenon of interest. Prior to the critical case sampling, individuals were recommended by my past associate teachers from my practicum placements based on their interpretation of a match towards my sampling criteria. The first participant was recruited through my past associate teacher where she forwarded my research recruitment information to the rest of her department. One of the teachers responded to the participant recruitment, and I subsequently ensured she met the sampling criteria prior to continuing with her participation. The second participant was recruited through a friend who knows many educators. She forwarded the email to a teacher who may be interested in my study and this teacher raised her interest to me directly.
This type of sampling method will allow me to pinpoint my research findings towards my central and subsidiary research questions.

### 3.3.3 Participant bios

The first participant, **Sharon**, identified as an experienced female teacher. She has taught various subjects in a native-immersed school that is outside of Canada, which has enriched her experience as a teacher in Canada. Currently, she is teaching Biology in a school in Thornhill, Ontario and her classes vary in grade and academic levels. Her experience with students with EBD include students who struggle with anxiety and low levels of executive functioning which leads to behavioural problems. Her teaching career totals to approximately ten years of teaching students of various learning levels including students with IEPs.

My second participant, **Wendy**, has been teaching for approximately eight years. She has taught Science and Biology subjects primarily, and in two different schools in the Greater Toronto Area. Both schools in which Wendy had taught at had a culture of high academic achievement. Thus, she shares interesting anecdotes of students with EBD in her classroom and in such a competitive school culture.

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis, like any data analysis is the process of making sense of the data collected in response to the research questions and research topic (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). Qualitative and quantitative data analysis differ, however, in that in qualitative data analysis, the researcher must interpret the data based on their own understanding and reflexive positioning. Thus, data analysis often begins during the data collection process and is often an ongoing process (Bradley, Curry, & Devers, 2007). For this research study, I followed the
general procedure for qualitative data analysis and in particular, a deductive approach in
developing a code structure.

In this study, after fully transcribing the audio recordings, the data was coded in line with
my central and subsidiary research questions. Approximately 70 codes were generated in the
initial process. The codes were then re-assessed to identify commonalities and similarities
between codes. As such, 50 codes were finalized after this process. The data of both interviews
for each code were then categorized into categories. Data that were similar between interviews or
were referring to the same concepts were grouped together. In some cases, sub-categories were
produced to account for the large amount of rich data from the interviews. After all the data was
categorized, themes and sub-themes emerged from each of the categories which help answer my
central and subsidiary research questions.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

This study followed the guidelines for ethical review approval procedures for the Master
of Teaching program at the University of Toronto. The Master of Teaching program has been
granted annual renewal of ethics for studies conducted for the purpose of the Master of Teaching
Research Project (MTRP) through the Research Ethics Board (REB).

Potential participants for my study were contacted and informed about the general
purpose of my study prior to recruitment and selection and their participation was voluntary.
Selected participants were asked to provide consent through an informed letter of consent (See
Appendix A) prior to the beginning of the interview, which discussed the purpose of my study
and that the interview will be audio-recorded. A copy of the informed letter of consent was
provided to the participant for their records. The participants were also told that they have the
option to decline any interview questions and/or withdraw from the study at any time. Any self-
identifying data was omitted from the data by using pseudonyms for participant and school names in order to preserve their anonymity. Audio-recordings from the interviews will be password-protected and secured for a maximum of five years after the completion of the MTRP.

Qualitative research can potentially be ethically high-risk if participants are being asked sensitive questions about their personal practice or values. This research study, however, has a low ethical risk. In my qualitative approach, participants were interviewed in a natural environment (not experimentally manipulated), thus the risk level should be no greater than that of everyday life (Creswell et al., 2007). Participation in the study was entirely voluntary and the researcher selected all participants based on their match to the sampling criteria. Lastly, a Master of Teaching course instructor supervised every component of the study including the development of the interview protocol. Thus, given these reasons, the risk of this study was considerably low. However, it is important to note that the questions asked in the interview may have elicited moderate sensitivity as teachers are being probed about practices in their classroom. In order to mitigate this effect, questions were worded in a way where teachers were asked about general practices that may or may not be their own practices. Teachers’ perspectives on the topic were gained through asking for their general knowledge on the topic.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

A significant limitation to this study was the sample size. Due to the parameters set out by the Master of Teaching Program, only a maximum of three participants were limited to the researcher. This can negatively affect the holistic view that was intended to be gained in this research as the viewpoints and data collected are from a narrow sample. Alternatively, a larger sample size would allow the researcher to make conclusions richer and more insightful. A second limitation was that of the sampling criteria. Again, due to the nature of the MTRP ethical
review protocol, the researcher was only permitted to interview educators. In this research, it would have been insightful to interview students with EBD to gain an understanding on what teacher practices work for them. Since the purpose of the research was to gain insight on the supports for students with EBD, it only seems logical to find out their perspectives on the issues as well.

The qualitative and interviewing aspect of this study is one of its major strengths. Semi-structured interviewing allowed the researcher to engage in rich conversation with the participant in order to gain significant insights to the research questions. Non-verbal cues like tone of voice and body language were also valuable data collected in this research. These aspects would not have been possible through a quantitative measure. These interviews allowed the researcher to develop a composite description of the participants’ experience with the phenomenon, as a phenomenological approach.

3.7 Conclusion

Through this chapter, it is made quite clear that the qualitative approach was a suitable method for investigating teachers’ perspectives on and reported practices for supporting students with EBD. Semi-structured interviews allowed for a comprehensive examination of the teachers’ experience with the phenomenon. Experienced high school teachers in the Greater Toronto Area who teach in general education classrooms containing students with EBD were requirements of participation in this study. This purposive sampling method and sampling criteria permitted the researcher to include participants that provided valuable insight on the central and subsidiary research questions. Coding for common themes in the interviews helped the researcher develop a greater understanding of the teaching practices in regards to students with EBD. Though this low-risk study is not without its limitations, it provides much strength in
understanding teaching more deeply and to improve teaching practices. The findings to this study will be explored in the following chapter.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings that emerged through the data analysis of two interviews with secondary school teachers – Sharon and Wendy (pseudonyms) – who have had experience working with students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD). My central research question, “How do secondary school teachers help students with EBD succeed in the classroom?”, was at the forefront while conducting my analysis. The purpose of this research is to understand what secondary school teachers can do to help students with EBD in their academics. As found in the literature review, student academic achievement is a significant predictor to their later success in life and their susceptibility to at-risk behaviours. Teaching-student interactions, school environment, school culture, educational policies, and stigmatization of EBD were also some of the significant contributing factors discussed in Chapter Two. Qualitative interviews were conducted to gain a deep understanding of the experiences of teachers helping students with EBD in their classrooms. In this chapter, connections are made between the teachers’ practices, beliefs, and attitudes about helping students with EBD and the research findings discussed in the Chapter Two literature review. Research findings from this study are organized into four main themes:

1. Overcoming of barriers as a barrier to the effectiveness of teacher strategies
2. Building a support community in helping students with EBD
3. Teachers’ perspectives on factors that support students with EBD
4. Learning environment: A significant factor

Barriers are firstly explored to help the reader understand the struggles that teachers face when helping students with EBD. Practical teacher strategies are then discussed to provide more
concrete practices to overcome the barriers mentioned. Sub-themes are presented in this theme to better describe the specific techniques used by the participants of this study. Then, the teachers’ philosophies of teaching are examined to gain insight into the required context for the effectiveness of the aforementioned strategies. Lastly, the school learning environment is analyzed to investigate the research problem in a larger context. For each theme, I will explain my interpretation of the data collected, provide supplementary concrete evidence to support my interpretation, and discuss the significance of my findings within the context of the literature discussed in Chapter Two. Finally, I will summarize the findings of this research study and transition to Chapter Five.

4.1 Overcoming Barriers as a Barrier to the Effectiveness of Teacher Strategies

Barriers often exist in many student-related problems and teachers will often find ways to overcome them; however, the act of overcoming the barrier may actually act as a potential obstacle in students’ ability to achieve success. These teachers identified barriers that existed and discussed how they worked around them. However, these teachers suggested that some students with EBD still did not succeed in their classes despite these teachers’ own best efforts.

Sharon described one of her typical Applied classes where most students are identified as having emotional or behavioural needs in their individualized education plans (IEPs). She felt that the school had a “good” support system for the students to become identified so that they could advocate for the needs they require. Sharon shared her beliefs about the effectiveness of having such a large population of students being identified in her school when she stated, the only issue that we have is it almost leans to, I don’t want to say too much support, but there is abuse of our [identification] system here. So, in terms of anxiety … kids are recognizing that you know, it’s the equity and not the equality kind of thing. They’re
recognizing it and they’ve been around long enough that they get it, but they kind of want a piece of that action … So, I feel almost like there’s some unrealistic supports that are being given to a lot of kids that aren’t necessarily helping them in the end.

In this account, Sharon brought up several important points that circled around her belief that there is an “abuse of our [identification] system”. Firstly, this abuse led to students getting support that they did not require, and thus potentially taking it away from a student who really needed it. Secondly, Sharon pointed out that the support “is not necessarily helping them in the end”. This is an interesting point as common sense would dictate that more support is better than no support. However, Sharon suggested that if we are supporting students who do not need this kind of support, we are preventing them from developing the necessary skills to succeed without the supports. For example, in one instance, Sharon was recommended in many of her students’ IEPs to provide extra time on a test to process thoughts. These IEPs reportedly suggested that if extra time was not provided, this could lead to behavioural problems. Sharon recognized that not all students with this accommodation on their IEP needed this kind of support and thus decided to make the test more difficult so that extra time is somewhat warranted. This became problematic as students who sincerely needed the extra time would fall behind because the test is now harder, and the students who did not need it in the first place would get used to the extra time given to them and may not be able to develop the necessary skills to complete the test within the allotted time. Wendy supported this notion when she said “we always say that in the real world, nobody is going to accommodate you. So how can it be helpful to give you extra time on a test when you don’t actually need it? You’ll just be perpetuating the situation!” By manoeuvring around the barrier instead of addressing it, these teachers worry that the barrier still exists and may prevent the student from succeeding.
Both Sharon and Wendy discussed not having enough time and funding to support students with EBD. Wendy described her situation in which there is a limited amount of space and time for students with EBD who fell behind to catch up, and her lack of expertise in the subject area in that:

I don’t think I have the knowledge of all types of mental health problems and we are expected to be experts on them because of our role as a teacher. I wish I had more resources, more training, more time … teacher-directed training would make a huge difference … having a one-hour lecture talking about anxiety is not going to help. I need something more concrete and it can be so frustrating when I don’t know how to help the student!

In this account, Wendy struggled trying to navigate around her lack of knowledge and funding for her training in this subject area. She felt that she is not doing the students justice when trying to help students with EBD because she is inadequately trained. Nonetheless, both teachers tried to find a way around this barrier by either stretching themselves or finding support from parents and staff members. If the support network for this student is overworked, this could cause the support to be unproductive. Sharon described her experience helping “Joseph”, a student with EBD, succeed by stretching herself and reaching out to other staff members for help by explaining that:

Sharon: We tried everything. You have your book of tricks that you try and go through. You try to help these kids achieve, but no, there was far more going on in this kid’s life that could be drilled down in one semester that we had trying to deal with him.

Researcher: Did the student fail the class?

Sharon: Oh, yeah! And that was unfortunate because we tried absolutely everything.
In this instance, Sharon implied that the student had much more going on than what she and the other staff member could attend to. If there was more time or funding to attend to these other issues, this student would have been cared for differently. Sharon also compared this with her experience abroad in an international boarding school. In that experience, she described the system to be very structured; if there was a student that gave the slightest hint of an emotional or behavioural problem, the issue would be addressed immediately by a dedicated staff member.

Sharon and Wendy both believed that one of the main barriers in helping students with EBD succeed is the lack of funding for a dedicated staff member to address these issues immediately. Regardless, as Sharon mentioned in her account of Joseph, teachers still have a “bag of tricks” that they use to hopefully help students with EBD “complete the school semester”.

It is to no surprise that students with EBD are more likely to perform below their grade level. Most studies have shown that they tend to perform one to two years below their level with an onset starting at a young age (Trout et al., 2003). In other aspects of the interview, Sharon described Joseph as an “interesting kid with little to no executive functioning” and evidently performed well below the expectation of this Applied class. The interesting part about this observation is that not only was Joseph performing below his grade level, but even with the persistent support of Sharon, he was still unable to succeed. Other research has found that Ontario educators have a single definition for students with EBD and do not consider the severity of the situation (Dworet & Maich, 2007). This was a significant factor in Joseph’s case as Sharon described him as having much more going on in his life other than just academics, but she seemed to not know what that might entail. Although other staff members may have an idea, as the first point of contact, Sharon did not know and this played a significant role in Sharon’s ability to apply effective intervention methods for Joseph.
4.2 Building a Support Community in Helping Students with EBD

Teachers who have experience working with students with EBD believe that the most important aspect of helping students with EBD is to build a support community. Specifically, Sharon and Wendy described their most effective communities requires the teacher to understanding the learner and reaching out to others for support.

4.2.1 Understanding the learner in the context of the classroom

The foundational strategy to connecting a student with EBD is to firstly understand who they are as a learner. Both participants placed significant importance on ‘getting to know the student’ and finding out about their interests. Sharon argued that by knowing more about the student, teachers are more able to effectively implement learning strategies and teach them the academics as she stated that

You have to have them on side. You got to have them personally before you’re going to get them on side to learn from you and that’s the main thing. If you don’t have [their attention] then they don’t care or respect you, or if they don’t see your interest in them as a person, then they don’t have an interest in learning from you.

This example demonstrated the importance of building a good relationship with your student before attempting to teach them content. Sharon also recognized that there is pressure for teachers to cover curriculum and it becomes increasingly difficult to integrate flexible time in the classroom to build that rapport. However, she affirmed that the diversion from the curriculum pays off in the long-run. Wendy echoed Sharon’s perspective when she stated that “once students realize that you want them to succeed, they will put in the effort to try and meet your expectations as well”. These findings validated the value in firstly establishing an understanding
of your role as a teacher and a sense of genuine care for the student before diving into the course content.

Finding out what motivates a student with EBD and their learning needs was also a strategy emphasized by Sharon and Wendy. By understanding those aspects, participants were able to use what they knew about the student to grab their attention for the lesson and course content. For example, Wendy understood that students in her classes were very grade-conscious and this is often the root of their emotional and behavioural struggles. As a result, she would modify the time-constraints on assessments to aid with these students’ struggles. When one of her students became stressed about her upcoming test, Wendy suggested that they write the test in two parts; this would mean that Wendy would have to place aside time to supervise the student through two parts of the test. Moreover, when Sharon noticed one of her students beginning to become irate, she would ask someone who understands the material to explain it to the student. Her understanding was that “when students with EBD act up, it’s usually because they don’t get it”. So she focused on helping the student understand the course content and she reported this to be an effective way of regulating the behaviour in her classroom. For another student, “George”, Sharon noticed that he had very limited executive functioning. To help George succeed in her class, she implemented rigid routines; she stated, “every single day, you walk in, you pick up your pages, you sit down, there’s a warm up… like I write down everything that’s going to happen in the class”. At the beginning, it was difficult for students to consistently follow the routines, but eventually, she reports, “they would pick it up and they would start to latch on to what was happening in the class”.

Participants provided a sense of taking things slow and going one step at a time, whether it was through building working relationships with students with EBD, or implementing small
changes to classroom routines. The idea was to understand what works for the learner and use it as ‘a magical weapon’ for reaching the student on a non-academic level.

Both teachers were empathetic towards their students and promoted building a positive relationship with their students. Johnson (2008) found that this is amongst the most common methods in which teachers help students with EBD. To be specific, Johnson (2008) found that while helping students with EBD, teachers were empathetic while providing advice and strategies, advocated for their students, and encouraged pro-social bonding. Malecki and Demaray (2003) found that apart from parental support, teacher influence was the most predictive factor for a student with EBD to achieve academic success and better social skills. In this way, both Wendy and Sharon’s push towards getting to know the student and caring for the student converges with the literature on supporting students with EBD.

Sharon’s experience presented here mirrored the research literature. In a study by Suldo (2009), the researchers found that students with EBD felt the teacher cared about them when additional academic assistance was provided. For Sharon, this often meant sitting one-on-one with the student during class time, or scaffolding content for the entire class. Sharon also had an open-door policy and invited students to extra-help sessions every day at lunch. She made this very clear to her students and always had this written on the board. Furthermore, Suldo (2009) commented that students in their study felt the teacher cared about them when they took interest beyond their academic achievements. Students in this study appreciated teachers who took time out of their lesson to get to know them personally and to provide them with breaks during the lesson (Suldo, 2009). In turn, Suldo (2009) found that these students tended to enjoy class more and tried harder at achieving their academic goals. This literature aligns greatly with Sharon’s
philosophy of teaching. She focused on getting to know her students before engaging in a lesson and believed her personal interest in her students made or broke their classroom experience.

Doll, Zucker and Brehm (2004) found that students with EBD are more likely to achieve their academic goals when there were aspects of teacher care, differentiated instruction, culturally relevant pedagogy and accommodations. In Wendy’s case, her focus was more on providing lessons that were engaging to the students and took their needs into consideration. For example, Wendy implemented accommodations when she allowed her student to write the test in two parts and supported their needs through differentiated instruction when conducting lab-work. Furthermore, she demonstrated a level of teacher care when she took the time to listen to her students concerns and provided the necessary support to help them through their struggles.

4.2.2 Reaching out to others for support

Both teachers in this study realized the importance of developing a supportive team of educators and administration to help each particular student with EBD succeed in the classroom. Sharon provided a sense of hope when she advised, “you are not on your own when it comes to helping students with EBD. The EA is there to help and often has a lot of really good connections with the student’s parents. Use the resources and people you have, because you can’t do it alone”. Wendy also stressed the difficulties in helping students succeed if she only sees them for 75-minutes a day, and that “the larger the support network was, the better it became for the student”. She understood her students’ struggles as she described that

Sometimes the only safe place for a student with EBD is inside the classroom. We may be the only adults that give them the time of day and have the ability to support their academics. The school as a whole needs to have a system that supports the students so
that they can walk into this school and feel confident to accomplish what they need to accomplish for the day.

Wendy particularly articulated this idea well, in that educators must establish a team effort with a mutual goal of helping the student succeed. Sharon shared an experience in which she became emotionally drained because of the number of emotional and behavioural challenges in her classroom in her early years of teaching. She blurted out into tears in her office when another teacher was walking her through coping mechanisms. Prior to this encounter, she did not reach out to many staff members for help; she was stretched thin. From then, she expressed the importance of having a good support network for the student and herself when battling the struggles that students with EBD are facing.

4.3 Teachers’ Perspectives on Factors that Support Students with EBD

Teachers’ perspectives on and understanding of the climate of the education system influences their approaches in supporting students with EBD. These teachers shared their philosophies on varying aspects including their own perspective on the student’s role in their own education, parent’s role on their children’s education, and administration’s role on the student’s education.

4.3.1 Student’s role in their own education

Both Sharon and Wendy share their philosophies of teaching; although they can be seen as somewhat different, they both share a compelling commonality in that they are both ambivalent in accommodating students with EBD because accommodations are not always present outside of the educational community. Wendy expressed that “students should hold more accountability for their learning” and that “students with EBD, in particular, should practice how to cope with their struggles”. For example, Wendy described an experience she
had with a student, “Brooke”, who approached her five minutes prior to a test stating that she was not ready to write the test. Wendy gave Brook the option to attempt to write the first section of the test and to write the remainder during lunch period. She does not, however, allow the student to write the test on a different day simply because she was not prepared. Wendy explained that

students need to understand how to advocate for themselves. I asked her if she had come in for extra help and why she didn’t approach me earlier. I think it is important that the student understands that you can’t come to me 5 minutes before the test to say you are not ready. You need to advocate yourself before that!

As a result of Wendy’s understanding of the role of the student in their own learning, she tended to focus on strategies to help them achieve success academically. She made accommodations through assessments, modelled expectations, and provided students with supplementary resources to help them understand the course content.

Sharon came to an understanding that her philosophy of teaching was “all about teaching the curriculum” when she first entered the profession. As she gained experience abroad and experience with students with EBD, however, she realized that accommodations are not what will prepare students for the “real world”. In fact, teaching the curriculum that interests the students most is what will prepare them. Sharon’s current beliefs and teaching and learning where that

I want to teach students how to learn; the personal living skills we give them are what they need. I want to teach them the strategies to cope with the real world! The other stuff is all extraneous fluff in there. If a student wants to talk about something that isn’t
exactly the curriculum, I’ll talk about it! If I can get somebody interested in something and get them fired up about something Science-y, then yeah! I’ll drop what I’m doing.

Of course, though, Sharon still found a way to “cover the curriculum”, but that was not her main priority. This philosophy of teaching is reflected in the strategies she chose to implement when helping students with EBD. She wanted to know what interests them and used that information to engage them in critical conversations. She would go out of her way to get to know a student and their personal life in order to convince them into caring about what is being taught in class. Sharon found this method worked best for her and her students with EBD.

Doll, Zucker, and Brehm (2004) explored the level of influence a teacher has on a student with EBD. Teachers generally are influential figures to their students and, thus, their philosophy of teaching can turn into a student’s philosophy of learning. Wendy’s approach was reportedly to give her students ‘tough-love’ and to provide them with the opportunities to advocate for themselves. However, she emphasized that she was often misunderstood; her students felt that she simply did not empathize with their situation. Wendy found that she had to meet with the student to explain that she is giving them a chance to develop their advocacy, communication, and time management skills so that the situation would improve. Sharon, on the other hand, reportedly seeks to develop a positive teacher-student relationship with her students. It was clear that she was interested in her students and would put her students’ interests at the forefront of her teaching. Both these examples demonstrated the importance of a positive teacher-student relationship where communication is central. Malecki and Demaray (2003) proposed this phenomenon in their study where they found that teacher-student relationships, similar to Sharon’s example, are associated with positive outcomes to students’ emotional and behavioural well-being, and in turn, their academic success.
4.3.2 Parental role in child’s education

Teachers found that understanding the support received at home of a student with EBD is valuable in supporting the student’s needs. When the participants were asked questions like “did you find calling home and reporting the emotional and behavioural problems of the student help alleviate the problem?” it was interesting to find that they knew a lot about the effectiveness of this strategy for each particular student. For example, if the parent was unsupportive, the teacher would avoid calling home when there was an issue with the student. In this instance, she recalled and described by stating that

We knew he was being raised by a housekeeper. There’s far more issues going on in his life that was undiagnosed and I’m not able to do that. I would call the mother to address his issues and she would tell me to “leave a message with [her] secretary”. I mean, the only helpful thing from that conversation was that now I know why the student is the way he is!

In this example, Sharon also shared how this gives her insight in his at-home life. She implied that this is indicative of why the student acts the way he did and that is because he did not get the attention he needed at home. Sharon also used her knowledge about one student not being provided with a lunch or money from home to build a relationship with the student. Knowing this, Sharon and her colleague would take turns tracking down the student and taking her for some lunch. Through instances like this, both teachers reported that this was a way for them to understand the student on a more personal level so that she could develop individualized strategies to help the student succeed.

Both Wendy and Sharon have demonstrated that creating a welcoming community where the student has a healthy relationship with the teacher that fosters a sense of belongingness as a
key to their main strategies to helping students with EBD. In a study by Ungar and his colleagues (2007), the researchers emphasized the importance of these aspects in helping academic achievement. Furthermore, being a part of a healthy community helps the student develop a sense of social identity which improves their confidence in that environment (Ungar et al., 2007). These environmental characteristics would, in essence, aid the student in all environments so long as these characteristics exist. Ungar (2011) also found that changing a child’s context and social ecology rather than having the child adapt to a poorly resourced environment as the foundation for good intervention. A family environment that does not support a sense of belongingness, community and healthy relationships can hinder the student’s ability to manage their emotional and behavioural problems, and also their ability to achieve academic success. On the contrary, if the family environment is supportive, this could change the fate of this student entirely.

Malecki and Demaray (2003) found that there was a significant influence of parental emotional, instrument, and informational support on the student’s well-being. Furthermore, teachers found that good parental support can positively change the outlook of the student’s ability to achieve success (Malecki & Demaray, 2003). Sharon, in her example, saw the opposing side of this research finding in which poor parental support can negatively change the outlook of the student’s ability to achieve success. Though Sharon found a way to overcome her challenges with getting support from the student’s parent, the outcome of this student’s success would have been different if the parental support was also different.

4.3.3 Administration’s role on students’ education

Time and space were both cited as barriers for these teachers in helping students with EBD. Both Sharon and Wendy believe that administration should play a role in relieving these
barriers in support of their students’ education. They mentioned that it is a vicious cycle where, as Sharon stated, “I’m finding because the admin is busy and we have no [funding], you’re getting a ton of this behaviour that’s not dealt with”. This becomes problematic when teachers cannot find the time to address the needs of students with EBD in the classroom because there are too many in one room. Wendy suggested, “I have to admit; I focus my time on the students who want to learn”. The lack of funding to support students with EBD can lead to more students with EBD having their problems ignored, which results in the teacher having to spend more time supporting these students.

Both Wendy and Sharon expressed that they believed there needs to be greater staff and funding support to help students with EBD succeed. In particular, the participants hoped for a dedicated staff member to be available to address particular emotional or behavioural concerns of students. They stressed that it is often difficult to attend to each individual student because there is not enough time in a 75-minute class period. The participants’ observations have been echoed in the literature as researchers found that most schools will offer educational assistants to help these students within the classroom. There was an emphasis on being able to provide a wider range of services to these students by having an additional certified adult in the room (Dworet & Maich, 2007). Santor, Short, and Ferguson (2009) expanded on this and found that intervention programs are often ineffective due to lack of individualization of the program to the student, and the school not receiving adequate resources to execute such programs. The extent to which this barrier plays a role in the lives of students with EBD was clearly demonstrated in the experiences shared by Wendy and Sharon. These teachers felt the pressure and stress of helping students with EBD because of the lack of funding and effective training programs.
4.4 Learning Environment: A Significant Factor

These teachers perceive that the existing school environment influences the ability of a student with EBD to succeed. Currently, the school culture is in a limbo between a competitive, traditional nature versus one that supports students’ well-being. Both teachers work at the same school board and recognized that mental health and anxiety have been a focal point in the school board’s initiative.

Wendy found that “behavioural and at-risk behaviour has become more prevalent in the last couple years and this could be a result of more educated staff that is able to identify these signs”. She reported that there are school-wide radars that help promote better overall well-being for staff, faculty and students. However, both participants report their schools to be highly competitive and academically driven due to the beliefs of parents and the administration. Sharon described her experience in the school she currently works where

the kids here need those marks to get into university. The competition here and the understanding of their stress here is a completely different ball game. I mean these kids have ulcers in grade 10. It's crazy!

Both teachers found that the competitive nature of their learning environment sometimes forced students into emotional and behavioural struggles which further perpetuated the situation.

In a study of understanding the effectiveness of intervention programs for student with mental health problems by Garner, Kauffman and Elliot (2014), the researchers found that youth avoided seeking help and intervention programs for EBD if the environment stigmatized mental health negatively. Furthermore, in a similar study, Kaufman (2014) found that one of the greatest predictors of students not identifying as having EBD is due to a negative perception of EBD. There was a clear understanding then, that student well-being and a healthy community is
the foundation for the student’s ability to achieve success despite their emotional and behavioural struggles (Kaufman, 2014). In a different study by Cook and Ruhaak (2014) where researchers were investigating the link between causality and EBD, the researchers found that students placed the responsibility on schools as a whole to be the perpetuators of stigmatization of mental health and EBD. Although school boards are actively trying to promote positive overall well-being in schools, more needs to be done to de-stigmatize mental health in schools for the betterment of students with EBD receiving effective help from all aspects of their school experience.

4.5 Conclusion

Through this analysis, four main themes emerged. Firstly, barriers existed in helping students with EBD and teachers were able to find methods to overcome these barriers. However, the act of avoiding the barrier is not eliminating it, resulting in the factor persistently limiting the student’s ability to achieve success in the classroom. Teachers suggest building support communities for students with EBD is one of the most effective ways to help students succeed. Often times, these were strategies to help the student and the teacher to get through the semester. The most important step in building this community mentioned by both participants was to get to know the student. Both teachers developed a professional personal relationship with their students, got to know their interests, and knew what motivated them. They then took advantage of what they knew to draw students’ attention towards course content. Reaching out to other members of the school community for assistance as the next step for teachers in helping students with EBD. Both teachers felt supported in the school community when helping students with EBD and placed value on educational assistants. Moreover, teachers’ attitudes towards the educational climate played an important role in these teacher’s reported success in helping
students with EBD. Both teachers had similar perspectives on the student’s role on their own education, parental role on their child’s education, and administration’s role on their student’s education. Both teachers believed that it is not the sole responsibility of the classroom teacher to help students with EBD succeed, but rather the entire school climate. More overtly positive and caring interactions with the students tended to be more helpful to students with EBD. Lastly, a school environment that supported student well-being and de-stigmatized mental health was more conducive for the success of students with EBD. The findings presented in this study suggested that there are roadblocks in helping students with EBD in the bigger picture, but teachers can contribute a significant influence through practical strategies in and outside the classroom.

Given what we now understand are some of the obstacles teachers face in helping students with EBD and their recommended practical strategies, Chapter Five will discuss broad and narrow implications based on these findings. In particular, to address the obstacles found in this study with the stakeholders involved – such as, teachers, administration and parents. For the educational community, as a whole, these findings need to be applied to the bigger picture of education in order to help students with EBD succeed in general education classrooms. These findings also improve my own professional practice and trajectory of my career in education.
Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter will unite the key research findings discussed in Chapter Four with the primary purpose of the study discussed in Chapter One to propose implications and recommendations. As this study explored the strategies of secondary school teachers in helping students with emotional and behaviour disorders (EBD) succeed academically, secondary school teachers hereon forth will simply be referred to as “teachers”. The key findings in Chapter Four will be re-visited and the significance of these findings will be examined. Using these findings, broad implications will be explored to understand the impact of these findings to the educational community, and narrow implications to my personal professional identity and practice will be discussed. Recommendations will then be proposed as a product of the discussion of findings and implications, and areas of future research will be suggested. A brief conclusion will be presented to finalize the research study.

5.1 Overview of Key Findings and their Significance

As a result of analyzing the data collected from two teacher interviews, four main themes became salient. In both interviews, teachers provided many practical strategies that they reportedly implement in their classroom to help students with EBD. However, there were many other factors that influenced the academic success of a student with EBD. These peripheral findings, in fact, became a focal point to many of the implications and recommendations that extended from this research study.

Firstly, both teachers identified that barriers, including lack of time and resources, existed when helping students with EBD succeed in their classrooms. They also identified the methods they used to overcome these barriers in varying incidences. Although the strategies presented
seem promising, both teachers still found that their students were unable to achieve academic success. I found that both participants were using strategies to avoid barriers, but the strategies failed to eliminate the barrier. This in turn reportedly hindered student ability to achieve academic success. Thus, the teachers’ avoidance of a barrier becomes a barrier on its own towards the effectiveness of teacher strategies in helping students with EBD achieve academic success. Existing research demonstrates that funding and availability of time and resources to be a significant factor in the ability of a student with EBD to achieve academic success (Dworet & Maich, 2007; Santor, Short, & Ferguson, 2009). This theme is significant in understanding the consequences of underfunded programs and lack of time and resources for teachers to implement effective programs for students with EBD.

It was prominent that both teachers felt that building a support community for a student with EBD was the most effective way in helping them achieve success. The two main ways of building this community is to firstly understand the student as a learner and as an individual, and also to reach out to others for support. Particularly, it is important for teachers to get to know the student before attempting to implement superficial strategies. Teachers’ attitudes towards students and learning influenced the strategies they chose to implement. Sharon believed that teaching students skills were more important than teaching the curriculum. As such, she would spend more time building rapport. On the other hand, Wendy believed that students with EBD need more time and scaffolding when learning the curriculum, and that this was an important factor in achieving academic success. Accordingly, she encouraged students to approach her for extra-help during outside-of-class hours. It is significant for teachers to explicitly demonstrate their philosophy and expectations of students with EBD to help them achieve academic success.
Finally, the participants discussed the learning environment as an important factor to the students’ opportunity to achieve academic success. School culture and school safety were stresses students with EBD had to face in their learning environment. Like in other research, negative stigmatization of mental health was a significant indicator of a student with EBD in seeking help and intervention programs. Furthermore, a healthy learning community contributes to healthy well-being (Garner, Kauffman & Elliot, 2014; Ungar, 2011).

5.2 Implications

The findings from my study acknowledges the existing literature as well as informs the development of this area of research. In the following sub-sections, I will discuss the broad implications to the educational community and narrow implications to my personal professional identity and practice that emerged from the findings.

5.2.1 Broad implications: The educational community

Through my study, there is a prominent implication that teachers may not realize the importance of getting to know students with EBD prior to implementing strategies to help them succeed academically. Adolescent students with EBD may feel uncomfortable sharing personal struggles at home and at school with their general education teachers because of the stigma that exists in secondary schools regarding mental health. If this is the case, this limits students with EBD from effectively advocating for their needs with their general education teachers. Both participants in my study described the significance of building rapport to help students with EBD achieve success, and more specifically, these teachers needed to initiate the conversation so that students with EBD can gain a sense of trust and comfort with them. As Sharon mentioned, “I wouldn’t have known that [he] was going through all those things at home. Sometimes it’s the quiet ones you should worry about”. For Sharon, after knowing what she knew about this
student, she changed her approaches and strategies so they would be more effective. She also discussed how her initial teacher education program pushed teachers to focus on the curriculum in the classroom. Teachers could forget that teaching is more than about the curriculum, and it is important to know who the audience is before diving into the curriculum. This implication can change the focus of initial teacher education programs, professional development programs for existing teachers, and much more.

Many of my participants’ anecdotes described students with EBD who had parents who were not actively involved in their child’s education. These findings imply that parents of young adolescents with EBD may not realize their influence on their child’s educational experience and opportunity for academic success. More importantly, a parent uninvolved in their child’s education may pose as a negative influence, and thus, affecting the students’ perspective on schooling. At-home support is often more, if not equally, important than their in-school support. Teachers also believed that family dynamics can predict the degree of a students’ needs. As such, the administration and educational community may need to take into consideration the availability of parental support in their students’ education.

Lastly, the lack of funding and resources available to general education teachers in support students with EBD may discourage a teacher from going beyond what is needed to help a student with EBD achieve academic success. Not all strategies that my participants described worked with every student with EBD. Their accomplishments in this area of their profession is attributed to trial-and-error, learning from mistakes, and a lot of dedication and persistence. Luckily, both participants had a good support network, but teachers who do not have this kind of support may feel stressed and stretched-thin. This may inadvertently limit the opportunities for students with EBD to receive the support they need in a general education classroom.
Government officials and school administrators should consider this implication in adding more supports for teachers and students in order to help students with EBD to succeed.

5.2.2 Narrow implications: Professional identity and practice

This research study has greatly influenced my philosophy of teaching and learning, and my approach towards inclusive education. I have gained a new understanding of what it means for every student to have the opportunity to succeed. Sharon and Wendy both convinced me that skills-based teaching is more effective than curriculum-based teaching when working with students with EBD. Instead of teaching direct content to meet curriculum expectations, it is more important to help students with EBD develop the skills necessary to understand any content. Getting to know students with EBD as young adolescents with specific interests, needs, and experiences, go hand-in-hand with creating this inclusive learning community. Thus, I find it necessary to start each lesson off by having a conversation with students with EBD regarding their state of well-being that day. For example, asking them how their day was and if they are feeling stressed or anxious about anything. Addressing their personal dilemmas first can help build a sense of trust and set a foundation for the lesson to come. For me to gain knowledge of effective interventions and strategies, I will seek professional development in this area.

Moreover, this study has demonstrated the importance of understanding your own reflexive positioning and philosophy of teaching in helping students with EBD. In my study, Sharon saw that the significance of teaching students “how to learn [and that] the personal living skills we give them are what they need.” Because she believed this, she approached students with EBD differently than, say, Wendy did. Sharon sought help from guidance staff, special education teachers, and youth workers to help fulfill her perspective on helping students with EBD succeed in her class. On the other hand, Wendy sought help from other general education
teachers who shared practical classroom strategies to help students with EBD reach curriculum expectations. Teachers need to continually reflect on their own reflexive positioning when helping students with EBD so they can, firstly, build a constructive support team, and secondly, create an honest and welcoming inclusive learning environment.

Lastly, conducting this study has greatly impacted my goals on helping students with EBD. It is difficult for a teacher to act alone in helping students with EBD achieve academic success. Often times, it takes a team of educators, caregivers, and administrators to achieve the necessary level of academic success. More importantly, though teachers are critical initiators in the process of helping student with EBD succeed academically, they play a small role in the overall process. As such, to make a bigger impact, I would have to pursue a career where I can spend more one-on-one time with students with EBD.

5.3 Recommendations

The implications of this study help devise several practical recommendations for general education teachers, school administrators, and ministries of education. In this section, I discuss some of these practical recommendations for the educational community:

- For general education teachers: Know that you are not alone in the process of helping students with EBD – other teachers and support staff can often help you develop coping methods for yourself and students with EBD. Furthermore, though it may be difficult to sacrifice precious classroom time, it is sometimes needed in order to ensure students with EBD are not left behind. In the short-term, take the time to get to know your students as it can make a significant difference in the long-run. As a long-term goal that may require greater planning, consider conducting one-on-one interviews with students with EBD to gain an understanding of their interests, needs, and experiences.
• **For school administrators:** Parents play an important role in helping students with EBD. School administrators should actively reach out to these parents to develop a holistic support team for each student, inside and outside of school. As a short-term goal, I recommend that schools allow time for teachers to hold conferences to strategize with school administrators, other educators, and parents. For a longer-term project, school administrators should develop a plan to keep track of the progress of students with EBD so effective intervention programs can be implemented.

• **For the Ontario Ministry of Education:** Underfunding schools in developing competent intervention systems for students with EBD greatly impairs the likelihood for them to achieve academic success. Schools need to have an adequate number of trained staff in order to build the support team for each student. Time, resources, and space are by far the greatest barriers for general education teachers in helping student with EBD. As a long-term goal, I recommend that the Ontario Ministry of Education allocate better funding towards this area in schools as it will improve the overall outlook of the educational community.

### 5.4 Areas for Future Research

Although this research study yielded interesting results, the purpose of this study was not to generalize findings. It has been able to provide us with insight on how these particular general education teachers attempted to help students with EBD achieve academic success in a secondary school classroom. Their perspectives are current and uniquely relevant to the educational research community.

Nonetheless, this study raised questions and ideas for future areas of research. Firstly, we were able to find out what strategies teachers currently implement in their classrooms and had
them evaluate which ones they thought were the most effective. An interesting approach would be to find out what strategies students with EBD perceive to be the most helpful. I believe that the findings to such study would be more applicable and practical. Secondly, the participants mentioned using technology as a means of helping students catch up with school work, but do not discuss how technology might be able to facilitate as a redefining instructional strategy instead of a substitutive instructional strategy. Lastly, both participant worked in schools in affluent neighbourhoods, and held a specific ideology on mental health and, particularly, the capacities of students with EBD. It would be intriguing to compare the experiences of these teachers with teachers who work in lower-income areas to observe the differences, if any, of the degree of academic success for students with EBD in varying income neighbourhoods.

5.5 Concluding Comments

To summarize, the purpose of this study was to understand how current secondary school teachers help students with EBD achieve academic success in a general education classroom. The themes that arose from this study provided an extension to what was discussed in the Chapter Two literature review. Both participants contributed raw anecdotal experiences that were critical in understanding the real implications of the teaching profession. Participants commonly described what they would theoretically do to help students with EBD succeed in the classroom, but then expressed what tended to actually happen in practice. I believe that this type of research can truly influence the future practice of many other teachers and the theories that are taught in initial teacher education programs. Furthermore, this research has become dear to me and made me frustrated with the difficulties teachers face in helping students with EBD succeed. If we think that, in general, teachers’ jobs are to help students achieve academic success, then why is it so difficult for this group of students? With that being said, I am grateful to hear that
teachers are persisting despite the lack of time, resources and funding to do so, and that with one student at a time, students with EBD can be given the opportunity to succeed.
References


Appendix A: Consent Form

Date: ______________

Dear ______________,

My name is Jacklyn Chung and I am a student in the Master of Teaching (MT) program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on teachers supporting students with emotional and behavioural disorders (EBD) in general education classrooms. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have experience working with students with EBD. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one roughly 60-75 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper and informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded.

The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,
Jacklyn Chung

MT Program Contact:
Dr. Angela Macdonald-Vemic, Assistant Professor – Teaching Stream
angela.macdonald@utoronto.ca
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Jacklyn Chung and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name: (printed) __________________________________

Date: _____________________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Primary Researcher: Jacklyn Chung

Start of Meeting (10 minutes)
Opening Script:
Hi, my name is Jacklyn and this interview is for my Master of Teaching Research Project. I am hoping to find how teachers help students with emotional and behavioural disorders succeed in the classroom. I think it is important to gain a teacher’s insight on this topic to help further improve our education system. This interview will be approximately 60-90 minutes long and I will ask you a series of questions relating to your practices and your viewpoints on this topic. As stated in the consent letter, all information will be kept confidential and will only be used for my research purposes.

Present and discuss consent form. Participant to read and sign the form; one copy is for my own files and the second is for the participant to keep. Answer any questions regarding the project at this point.

Turn on audio-recorder once consent form has been signed; state the date and time of interview.

Interview (60-75 minutes)
About the Interviewee
• Can you start by describing your current teaching position and teaching experiences?
  ➢ How long have you been teaching?
  ➢ What types of classrooms or subjects have you taught in?
  ➢ What grades have you taught?
  ➢ Have you always taught in this school?
• Can you tell me a bit about your formal training: where you studied, when you got your degree and how long ago you completed your schooling?
  ➢ Have you completed any additional qualification courses? What are they?
• Given the topic of the interview, how many students with EBD have taught?

Understanding the School Context
• What are some of the core values of this school community?
  ➢ How do these align with your own values?
• Describe some things that you like about working at this school.
  ➢ How about some challenges or changes you’d like to see?
• Could you describe what the learning environment is like on a typical day in your classroom?
  ➢ What are the students doing?
  ➢ What are you doing?
  ➢ What is the atmosphere like?
Could you describe the personalities that exist in your typical classroom?

What kinds of supports and barriers for students with exceptionalities exist in this school?
 ➢ How do these supports and barriers affect your practice?
 ➢ In your view, how do these supports and barriers affect students with EBD?

Support of students with EBD

During your career, can you estimate how many students you have worked with that have EBD in a general education classroom?

How recently have you worked with a student with EBD?

Can you talk about the moment you first realized that one of your students might have EBD?
 ➢ How did you know?
 ➢ What behaviours did you observe?
 ➢ How did you come up with these cues?

Did you do things differently once you knew the student had EBD?
 ➢ Did you seek professional assistance or resources from your colleagues?
 ➢ Did you communicate with the family?
 ➢ How did this affect your lesson planning?

Were there any unique challenges you experienced while working with this student?
 ➢ How would you handle misbehaviour of this student?
 ➢ How did this affect other students in the classroom?
 ➢ Are there differences or similarities in terms of your decisions if the student has an EBD?
 ➢ How do you or might you overcome these challenges?
 ➢ How are you or how are you not supported in your solutions?

Concluding thoughts

What changes do you think could be made at the school, school board, or provincial level to help students with EBD succeed in the classroom?

What advice would you give to another colleague on teaching students with EBD?

What other thoughts or questions do you have about students with EBD?

End of Interview (10 minutes)

Turn off audio-recorder.

Closing Script
This concludes our interview. Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to participate in my research project. I particularly appreciated your honest responses as this will really help contribute to the education literature. Do you have any questions for me at this point? [Answer any questions] If any other questions or concerns come to mind, my contact information and the contact information of the UofT Research Ethics Board is on the consent letter. Here’s a copy of the letter for your reference.